

MASSACHUSETTS REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION CAPITAL RESERVE ACCOUNT FY-2012 - ANNUAL REPORT



Prepared by:

Mass. Office on Disability
One Ashburton Place, #1305
Boston, MA 02018
[617] 727-7440
[Mass. Office on Disability](#)

and

Mass. Office of Access and
Opportunity
State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133
[617] 727-2040 x35418
[Office of Access and Opportunity](#)

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Mission Statement

Created in late FY-2009, the Reserve Account is a back stop for agencies that find they cannot meet the cost of providing reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities.

Note: The RACRA Fund is not meant to supplant existing agency resources to respond to reasonable accommodation requests, but to supplement them, particularly in difficult economic times such as the Commonwealth has recently experienced.

Available Funds

The Fund began with \$500,000. One hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) was available in FY-2010 and 2011. For FY 2012 through 2014, \$150,000 per year is available to supplement state agency efforts to effectively accommodate Executive Department employees with disabilities. The acceptable uses for the fund are established by the Office of Access and Opportunity in conformance with prescribed use of capital funds.

Goals & Objectives

The fund has three goals

- Provide financial relief to agencies that are successful in hiring and seeking to retaining employees with disabilities.
- Determine long-term funding needs for reasonable accommodation related activities.
- Begin to establish a centralized structure for addressing reasonable accommodation issues in the workforce.

The Process

The process for an agency to access the fund is intentionally simple.

- Agencies must:
 - Determine the specific need for accommodation,
 - Determine reasonable costs to provide the accommodation, and
 - Complete and transmit a one page application with a cover memo to the Massachusetts Office on Disability.
- MOD:
 - Reviews the agency application, discusses the impact of the proposed accommodation on existing infrastructure and discusses alternatives, if appropriate, and
 - Certifies eligibility to ANF
- ANF Office of Access and Opportunity:
 - Reviews MOD certification, and
 - Upon acceptance, either authorizes dispersal to the agency, or where under Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) jurisdiction, authorizes DCAM to proceed with the work using RACRA Funds.

Applications are addressed on a first come first serve basis. Funds are then distributed until exhausted during the current year. Once funds are depleted, agencies seeking funds are encouraged to reapply in the next fiscal year.

Recipients of RACRA FY2012 Funds

Four agencies completed RACRA funds requests in FY 2012. All four agency requests were funded in full. Grants ranging from \$669.99 to \$50,000 served 6,018 executive branch employees.

Table of Awards for FY 2012

Agency	Secretariat	Individuals Served	Request	Approved
Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity	ANF	6,000	\$669.99	\$669.99
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission	HHS	7	\$7,200.00	\$7,200.00
Massachusetts Office on Disability	ANF	2	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00
Bureau of State Office Buildings	ANF	9	\$32,204.00	\$32,204.00
Total		6,018	\$90,073.99	\$90,073.99

NOTE: The number of employees with disabilities served cannot be accurately determined due to the unique nature of one requestor. The Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity was approved for technology that enabled it to deliver a “Disability Awareness” training program to all Executive Branch employees. The training teaches employees about their rights and the opportunity to ask for a reasonable accommodation, and it ensures that managers have a better understanding of how to address the reasonable accommodation process with their employees. The training program will serve at least 6,000 people, many of whom are undoubtedly persons with disabilities.

Lessons Learned

Findings

- Three of the four funding requests related to technology. Although this was an approved category for funding and consistent with past funding awards, the RACRA is available for many other types of workplace accommodations.
- The real cost of technology accommodations often includes the need to upgrade core systems and infrastructure to ensure accessibility and compatibility.
- Information Technology Consolidation and Human Resources Modernization Initiatives within the Executive Branch (MassHR) will trigger a need for better coordination of agency resources, and possibly a need for additional resources, to meet accessibility requirements. Absent such coordination, agencies may turn to the RACRA to meet needs.
- Employees with newly adapted systems most often need training to maximize the Commonwealth's investment in adaptive technology. The current RACRA structure does not address this situation.
- During the course of the year it was learned the RACRA form on the MOD website was not accessible to people who use screen readers. The form was reformatted and is now accessible.

Recommendations

- Monitor IT Consolidation and HR Modernization efforts to identify whether the RACRA policy should be amended to specifically address infrastructure needs within agencies and Executive Department-wide.
- Training needs should be specifically addressed.
- Explore why only four agencies applied for funding consistent with the RACRA's purpose. Re-emphasize to agencies the role and scope of the RACRA as a resource for meeting reasonable accommodation responsibilities.
- Continue to outreach to Secretaries, Agency Heads and ADA Coordinators reminding them of the availability of RACRA.

Contacts for RACRA

- **Myra Berloff – MOD** Director of Massachusetts Office on Disability
- **Sandra Borders –ODEO** Director of Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity
- **Ron Marlow – ANF** Assistant Secretary for Access and Opportunity